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SUNSETS.

"Boy, call the gondola; the sun is set."

"When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather; for the sky is red."

THE majority of mankind, even in communities where æsthetics are recognized as a legitimate branch of human study, regard the sunset with a feeling indicated by one or other of the above quotations. The cool promenade or the red promise of a to-morrow which rejoices some and depresses others, according to the leadings of their respective interests as involved in the weather, are the sum and substance of the enjoyment given by the daily marvel which attends the withdrawal of light. It is not that every sunset is a brilliant or a gorgeous one, but every one is marvellous. The transition of color in the duldest is exquisitely beautiful, even of the cold, wet, stormy, cloud-drifting skies of the September equinoctial, when the only change is that from the warm greys of daylight to the sepulchral gloom of the lightless scud which floats across the pale green or yellow grey sky; and, though few would stay long to watch the spectacle so monotonous, there is an impressiveness in the very monotony, in the cold, joyless shutting down of the heavens, which, to one whose temperament admits of its right perception, or who feels it to be an emblem of life darkened down and veiled from all the brightness of the future, is freighted with a deeper meaning than any sky streaming and flaming with gold and scarlet, can have.

There are, with the infinite variety of sunsets, three distinct types of the phenomenon of which we occasionally get perfect and pure expressions, but which, for the most part, are more or less mingled. The first is that of the scud or rain-cloud, the most powerful in its effect on the mind from its varied character, wild, stormy, and sometimes inconceivably grand. Its most striking exhibitions are given when storms break up at sunset, and the clouds sweeping in immense and rugged masses at different elevations, assume accordingly different tints, purer as the clouds are higher from the surface of the earth. The lower clouds are often entirely shut off from the light of the sun, while the upper are in its full blaze, and the former will then be relieved in blue or purple against the crimson or gold of the latter. The cumulus sometimes figures largely in this display, especially when the sky is hot and hazy, when the huge masses boil up from the horizon, edged with brilliant gold.

We have here the most positive colors ever found in the sky, and in the tropics, particularly off the coast of Brazil, where this sunset is seen in the greatest perfection—the colors are brilliant beyond all conception, even like burnished metals. The gorgeousness of a tropical sunset is, indeed, beyond the imagination of one bred in our temperate climes, and is equally beyond the reach of Art to represent. In those which we see from our own windows, there is something which, in respect of intensity of color, defies the material of the painter.

The vagaries of the scud are most unaccountable. At times, the sky is unbrokenly covered with a mass of clouds, dull and gloomy, through which no glimpse of the sun can be seen; but, after it has sunk below the horizon, the under edges of every jag of the vapor is lit up with a red glow, like some leaden sea whose waves broke in crimson foam. I have seen this red so prevalent, that the local color of a landscape is changed to a modulated russet, a positive green being really not to be found. Again, when the rain lingers after sunset, and the gray streamers of the partial showers droop down from the clouds to the earth, here and there, and by chance one passes far off before the sun, it becomes a blood red curtain over the sun's couch.

The second is the cirrus sunset, as remarkable for repose, purity and delicacy of color, and serenity of light, as the former is for wild and startling effects. The colors the cirri assume at sunset, range from orange to the purest, faintest, golden yellow, with shadowed sides of pale amber. The tint becomes deeper and richer as the sun sinks; and the height of its glory is, generally, at about fifteen to twenty minutes after the disappearance of the sun, after which it fades very rapidly. Sometimes the cirri appear only as subtle threads of amber, without light or shadow—an infinitude of filaments individually almost indistinguishable, and deepening in their amber towards the horizon. When the sunlight has gone they are dark grey, but otherwise unchanged.

There is another form of cirrus, so rarified that it can only be seen when the sunlight is on it near sunset. Wordsworth has described it with the perfect truth which marks the reverential student of Nature:—

"Already had the sun,
Sinking with less than ordinary state,
Attained his western bound; but rays of light
Now suddenly diverging from the orb
Retired behind the mountain tops, or veiled
By the dense air—shot upwards to the crown
Of the blue firmament—aloft and wide,
And multitudes of little floating clouds
Through their ethereal texture pierced—ere we
Who saw, of change were conscious—had become
Void as fire; clouds separately poised,
Innumerable multitude of forms
Scattered through half the circle of the sky;
And giving back, and shedding each on each
With prodigal communion, the bright hues
Which from the unapparent point of glory
They had imbibed and ceased not to receive.
That which the heavens displayed the liquid
deep
Repeated; but with unity sublime!"

Here are noted most of the characteristic phenomena of this sunset. The "rays of light" is rather unphilosophical, though more poetical than the true noting of the appearance, which is really a ray of shadow, the whole atmosphere being filled with light, except where a cloud intervening throws a shadow across the sky. These shadows, after passing the zenith, converge to a point opposite the sun, so that if one looks to the east, he will see rays similar to

those in the west, and apparently pointing to another sun. If this be refraction, or merely the effect of perspective on parallel lines, it is hard to say—perhaps both.

The conclusion of Wordsworth's description is equally true and characteristic:

No trace remained
Of these celestial splendors; grey the vault—
Pure, cloudless, ether; and the star of eve
Was wanting.

As the light is withdrawn, the cirri are seemingly absorbed from the place they held for the brief occasion, and no trace of them, sometimes, can be seen, only the sky is greyer than usually. There is a great variety of forms in the cirri, the fleecy sort having often so much solidity that the distinction between the light and the shadowed sides is very marked, and the endlessly varied shades of amber in the latter are a marked feature, while the sweeping and liny forms, commonly called "mare's-tails," have no shadows, but are simply pencils of light vapor, of exquisite curves, and sometimes apparently leagues in length.

The third type is the cloudless sunset, embracing, with the modifications of atmosphere, the least interesting and the most poetical of sunsets. Of this class is the Italian, so famed among poetic images, the fullest expression of serene, mellow glory of sunlight. Rogers thus describes it:

"But lo, the Sun is setting; earth and sky
One blaze of glory. What we saw but now
As tho' it were not, tho' it had not been.
He lingers yet; and lessening to a point,
Shines like the eye of Heaven—then withdraws;
And from the zenith to the utmost skirts
All is celestial red!"

Not only the sky but the earth seems suffused in the glow of the sunlight. There are no cloud-forms to disturb the serenity of the sky, which is one tenderest gradation of gold into grey blue, deep, penetrable, very ether, into which the dawning stars beckon you timidly, and lead the rapt eye into depths immeasurable as eternity. Of this character also is the sunset of our Indian summer, which commences with the same pervading atmosphere, but which grows denser after two or three days, so that at length the sun is entirely lost. The universal brown tint of the landscape, however, at this season, deprives the sunset of the beauty it would have, if the greens and more vivid colors were present to relieve the golden tints of the sky. But the twilight that succeeds the sunset of the Indian summer is most perfect. The sky has the same grey depth that it has in Italy, and the stars peer out through it, yet lie far beyond it.

The brilliancy of the sunset varies much with locality and time of the year. There is a saying, true in the main, I think, that the sunsets are most brilliant in the months when the days are growing longer. In elevated regions, they are rarely so brilliant as in broad valleys, where there is much vapor. Thus, in the high table lands in the centre of New York State, they do not compare with those in the lower basin of the Mohawk, and the valley of the Con-

necticut. The European sunset again is as much inferior to the American in brilliancy, as that of North America is to that of the tropics in the same respect, or to that of Italy in serenity and radiance.

There seems to be no essential difference between the phenomena of sunset and those of sunrise, though some artists make a distinction of warmth and coldness. I am satisfied, from close observation, that there is absolutely no difference in the actual colors either of cloud or sky, in our climate, at least. The same reds, purples, and yellow tints, can be found in both, and I believe that any difference attributed to them should rather be assigned to the physical sensations accompanying the two periods of time. We conceive that the sunrise is cool, because the state of the atmosphere at that time makes an impression of coolness. There is a rising of vapors in hilly regions in the morning peculiar to that hour, and sometimes a kind of mist at evening, but not often one which does not continue until the next morning, unless a change of wind or weather should dispel it. We suppose that hot weather necessitates "hot" skies, but there is no time of the year more free from mist than July and August, when mostly the effects of the landscape are unpicturesque to the extreme from their uniform transparency of atmosphere—and in the tropics, the air is as clear as in our northern July, the local color of all objects at all times being painfully clear and obtrusive. There is no tone, no repose. In the Indian summer, the sun rises as red and hazy as he sat the night before, and so continues during the whole of that season. The blue haze that gathers along the Catskills is just as blue and as beautiful in the sunrise as in the sunset, and is the same at noonday, except that the whole landscape is a little colder.

Finally, observe one thing in the color of sunsets. When the most brilliant tints are in the sky, lay a piece of vermilion, or orange drapery in the light, and look from it to the cloud. You will see that in spite of the intensity of the color in the latter, that color seems toned down, slightly greyed as it were, so that though it is still purely red or orange, it is faintly so when compared with a near object of the same color. This, painters of sunsets generally lose sight of. They spend the utmost force of their palettes in attaining the intensity of the color in the sky, and then find that it lacks space and air, forgetting that any object at a considerable distance, however brilliant it may be, seems grey from air and space intervening when it is compared with a near object of the same color. In the most gorgeous sunset, the space and repose of the sky is no less remarkable than the brilliant color.

Edw. Spilvester.

SKETCHES OF INDIA.

IV.

APPROACH TO CALCUTTA.—THE DOORGA POOJAH.—THE COURSE.

BETWEEN Calcutta and the sea lie the Lunderbunds, or Beautiful Woods, covering the broad Delta of the Ganges. Beautiful, indeed, they are, but it is with the treacherous beauty of the tropics; their sunny luxuriance is full of danger and their

shade is the shade of Death. It is a desolate district of dense forest and jungle, intersected by a labyrinth of streams and salt creeks. The home of tigers and alligators, and the hiding-place of snakes. Over the edge of the waters bend the lithe stems and delicate foliage of bamboos, so thickly set that even the eye cannot penetrate far through their interwoven growth. Above them rise the close, dark heads of slower-growing trees, hung with the rich drapery of creeping and flowering vines. From the opposite banks of narrow channels, the stretching and drooping branches intertwine over the stream in a rich roof of green, and the fallen and decaying trunks bar all passage to those who would seek the secret recesses of the woods. Now and then the silence of this solitude is broken by the call of the deer, or the yelp of the jackal, by the crunch of the wild hog, the noisy cries of a flock of green parrots, or the leap and chatter of a troop of monkeys. In the main channels through the woods, boats laden with produce from the upper country, are forcing their slow way into the Hooghly that they may ascend to Calcutta; and once or twice a month the river steamers startle the stillness with the beat of their paddle-wheels, making their course through the intricate windings by day, and coming to anchor at night to avoid the dangers of the navigation in the dark.

Here and there in the woods are the huts of solitary devotees, who drag out a miserable, uncertain life, exchanging earthly gratifications and comforts for the odor of sanctity, the satisfaction of self-torment, and the hope of final unconscious absorption into the Divine nature. A little white flag tied to a tree shows the spot where a tiger has made a poor meal off some emaciated saint. In the dry season a few woodcutters and saltmakers take up their abode along the streams to carry on their trades, from which they gain a precarious support.

Two hundred years ago this district was the safe resort of Portuguese pirates and other Christian villains, "les gens de sac et de corde," as Bernier calls them, who desolated the neighboring country and laid in wait for vessels that went up or down the river. The stories of the early European settlements on the banks of the Hooghly, are full of the crimes and cruelties of these marauders. But, those days of blood have long gone by, and the river is crowded with the unarmed fleet of commerce—but the Lunderbunds, the Beautiful Woods, are still desolate.

It was on a warm, moonlighted, autumn night that I approached Calcutta, in a native boat, pulled by twelve oarsmen. The ships at anchor lay like still phantoms upon the black current. At their bows and at their sterns were lights, as if eyes, looking up and down the stream. Everything was still, save the stroke of the oars, and the bubble of the pipe, which the rowers smoked in turn. The trees on the bank scarcely moved, and their shadows were motionless on the edge of the water.

As the day broke, we could see scattered huts and villages along the shore, men driving cattle to the fields, and children looking out toward us as we passed along. The rowers on one side of the boat lifted their oars, and held them up for a moment,

to let a corpse float by untouched, on its way to the "black waters." Lying on the brown mud of the bank, where it had been stranded by the current, was a dead body, over which the pariah dogs were snarling as they tore its flesh, while a circle of carrion crows and bloated vultures sat round in grim order, waiting for their turn at the horrid feast. That sight was a whole revelation of sad horrors.

Every now and then we heard the beating of tambours, the blowing of horns and the shouts of people, for it was the morning of the chief day of the greatest of Hindoo festivals—the Doorga Poojah. All classes join every autumn in this celebration, commemorating the victory of the ten-armed Goddess over the King of the Giants Muheshu. According to the popular legend it must have been a fight not unlike that famous one between the Princess and the Magician in the Arabian Nights, save that the Goddess came out of it without special harm. While the festival is kept, there is a general holiday. Business is suspended, and feasting, music, sacrifices, and processions, take its place. On the last day, the images of Doorga are brought from the places where they have been worshipped, down to the sacred stream, to be cast into it, that the Goddess may return to her favorite abode.

As we came near a large village, we heard one of these processions approaching. The boatmen pulled toward the shore; and when the image, borne above the heads of the people, and surrounded by a shouting crowd, came in sight, the head man of the boat called out to me, "Look, Sahib, look, there my God!" It was the clumsy image of a yellow woman, with ten arms, standing erect, with one foot upon a lion, and the other upon the back of a buffalo, from whose neck the body of the Giant, pierced by a spear which the Goddess held in one of her hands, was rising. The figures were made of straw, covered with clay, gaudily painted, decked with fluttering tinsel and artificial flowers, and supported on a light frame of bamboo. The crowd hallooing and yelling, full of excitement, ran down the bank into the stream, and the bearers of the image threw it with a sudden plunge into the water. The Goddess broke in pieces as she fell, and her worshippers splashed and shouted their farewells to her. Then, a bramin came to the top of the bank, bearing a tray of fruit and grain and sacred grass, and threw them in as a final offering. A little aside from the noisy mass of worshippers stood an old woman, up to her middle in the water, telling her beads and mumbling her devotions. I wondered what prayers or charms she was uttering, and gave up as a vain fancy the tracing of her thoughts through their obscure and crooked windings. Through confusion and darkness did some gleams of light struggle into her blockaded heart? Doorga, and winking Virgins! Would not this old soul find many sisters of superstition in Italy, perhaps even nearer home?

At last the outskirts of the city came in sight, and turning into a fine open sweep of the river, we passed the green lawns and thick woods of the Botanical Garden, while on the opposite side were the pleasant, verandahed houses of Garden Reach,